

# The Great Ifugao War: A Study in Archaeology and Oral History

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EXCAVATIONS begun in central Ifugao Province of northern Luzon in 1961 (Fig. 1; Maher 1973) were resumed in 1973 on an expanded scale. Where four sites in two agricultural districts were investigated through excavations in 1961, the 1973 research produced excavations at eleven village sites in four agricultural districts, Bannawol, Amganad, Nabyun, and Pu'itan. One of the sites, If-3, had been investigated in 1961 and yielded a surprisingly early radiocarbon date of  $2950 \pm 250$  B.P. Previously permission to dig in the midden areas below the site had been refused. In 1973, however, the owners were more agreeable, and that part of the site received extensive testing at the outset of the new season. The other ten sites—selected for their locations relative to the drainage system of their particular district—were all new.

The recent excavations have produced many times more artifacts and other information than the earlier research, and analysis is by no means complete. Nevertheless, there was a special discovery which can be examined separately from the rest. Toward the close of the field season, while excavating at Gawwa, a village of the Pu'itan district located deep in the valley virtually on the banks of the Alemet River (Fig. 2, Plate I), we encountered a rough slab of stone in one of the 5-foot exploratory squares. Only 8 inches from the surface at the north end of the square, the stone extended completely across its east-west dimension and slanted to a depth of 16 inches at its southern edge, 2 feet from the southern limit of the square (Fig. 3). In the southwest corner was a smaller, flat stone  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet long and 2 feet wide. The remainder of the square's floor at that depth was earth. While the large stone was firmly set in place, the smaller one, once free of its overburden of earth, could be lifted easily. Beneath it was an open space of the horizontal dimensions of the small stone and extending 21 inches below it. Examination revealed that it continued to the north under the large stone. It was found, indeed, that it could be

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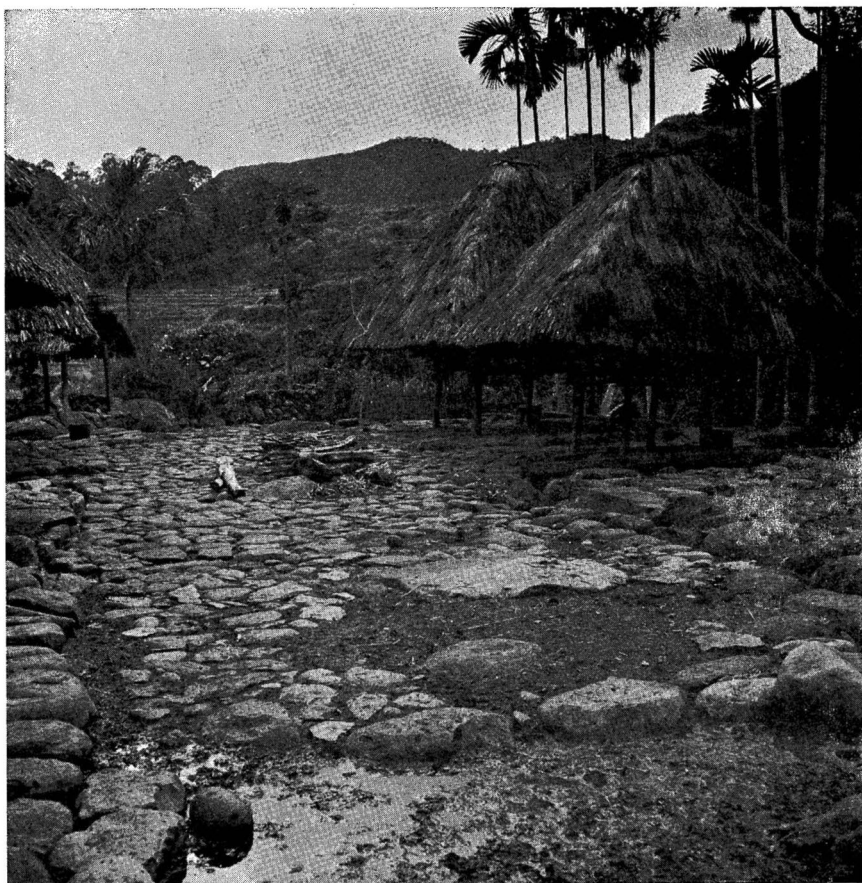


Plate I Lower part of Gawwa village, Pu'itan. The underground chamber is located off the stone paving just beyond the last house on the right.

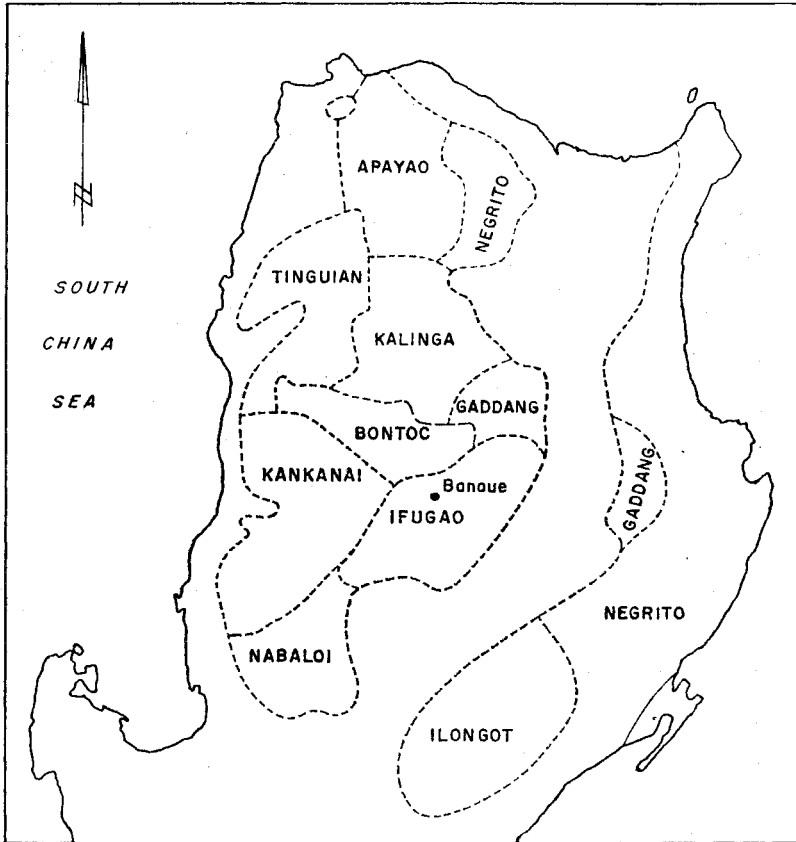


Fig. 1 Distribution of non-Christian ethnic territories in northern Luzon (modified from Barton 1919).

entered, and when that was done we discovered what amounted to a small underground chamber, empty except for root growth and a midden-like deposit about 4 inches deep on its floor. The north and west walls of the chamber were made of waterworn stones of various sizes from more than 2 feet to less than 6 inches in diameter. The south and east walls were of hard compacted clay.

Considered separately from its entrance passageway, the underground chamber measured 4 feet 9 inches from its earthen floor (cleared of the thin layer of culture-bearing deposit) to the underside of the large stone which served as a ceiling. The horizontal dimensions were 3 feet 6 inches north-south and 3 feet  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch east-west. By chance the northern and western boundaries of the excavation square coincided almost precisely with those of the subterranean area.

A theme which appears with some frequency in Ifugao conversation is that of buried treasure. The digging activities of the archaeologist probably brought it to mind more often than would ordinary circumstances, but it is there, an uncertain hope for instant wealth among a people who as much as any other group value property. Expectations could soar with the slightest encouragement. Earlier in the field season, while excavating at the village of Bo'oh in the Bannawol district, we

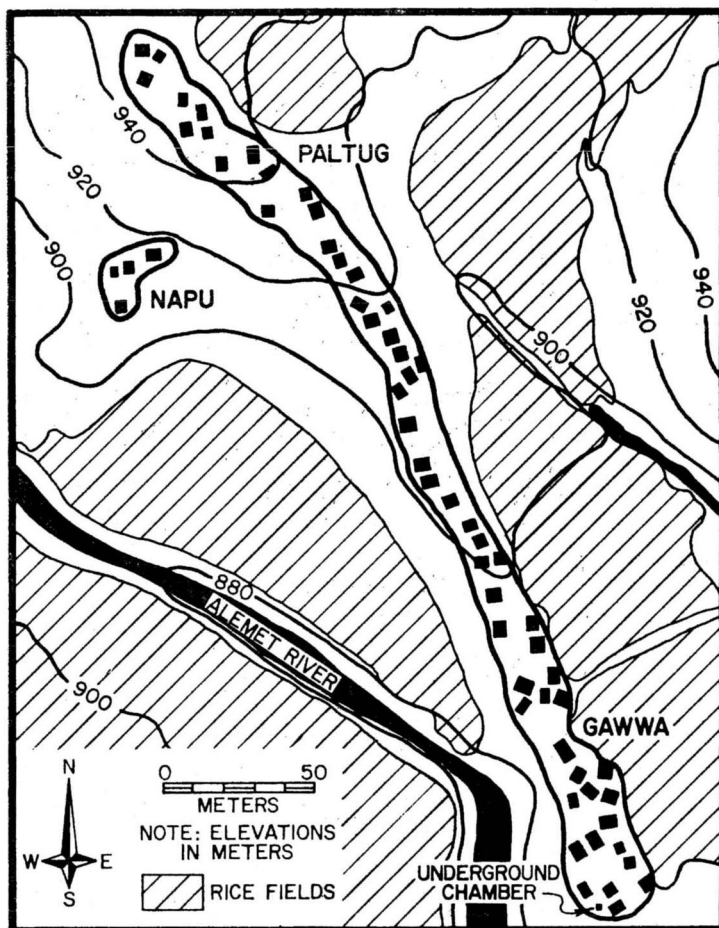


Fig. 2 Map of Gawwa, Pu'itan, showing location of underground chamber (after Conklin).

encountered a situation which initially seemed to be of the same order as the later discovery at Gawwa.

The work at Bo'oh was in its final phase, and I had gone farther up the valley to examine excavation possibilities at Alemet village, which I expected to offer an example of a relatively recent settlement. When I returned to Bo'oh in the afternoon, my crew chief, José Binwag, directed me immediately to a 5-foot square being excavated on the west side of the village and rather separate from the main area of investigation which was on the east. I found the two crewmen working the square in a state of excitement, which they were doing their unsuccessful best to suppress. They gave the impression of sharing an important secret which was getting out in spite of them.

At a depth of 30 inches in the western half of the square, they had found the floor of the excavated area producing an unusual hollow sound. At 3 feet the solid soil gave way to very soft and loose soil which seemed to be contained within a definable area surrounded by normal firm soils. The area of loose soil extended to a depth of

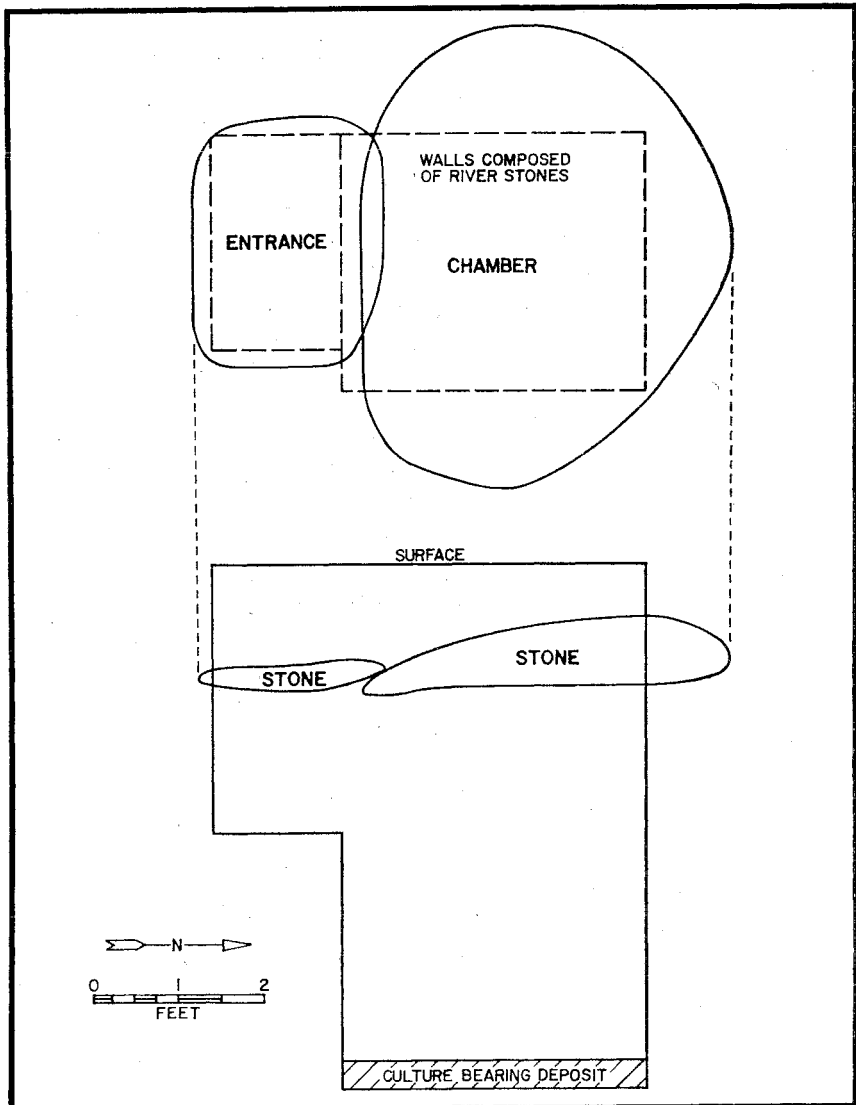


Fig. 3 Top and side views of underground chamber at Gawwa, Pu'itan.

58 inches below the surface and appeared to extend horizontally out of the square to the west. As it became apparent that we had encountered what was at one time an underground opening, the men became convinced that we had hit upon treasure buried at some early time and unknown to people now. At a moment scarcely less tense than at the opening of the tomb of Tutankhamun, the owner of the property, who was also a member of the crew, sauntered over, inspected the situation, and informed us that some years before he had dug a privy on that spot. Long out of use and filled in, it had been forgotten until its discovery by the science of archaeology.

It is very clear, however, that the subterranean chamber at Gawwa was not an abandoned privy. Its structure alone defeats the imagination as to how it could function in that role. My first reaction (as it had been at Bo'oh) was that we had come upon a burial tomb. Since natural caves do not occur in this part of Ifugao, temporary tombs may be excavated into the side of the mountain to accommodate a recently deceased person in an extended position in his coffin until his bones may be cleaned and taken into a relative's home. Although the Gawwa chamber was not large enough to contain a coffin of ordinary size, it might have served, I thought, as a later storage place for bundles of cleaned bones. The people of the village, however, although unaware of the chamber's presence until now, firmly rejected my interpretation and identified it as a hiding place for valuables such as porcelain jars, gongs, and valuable beads. They felt that the occasion for it must have been what I had come to think of as the "Great Ifugao War," a near legendary event of the past which I had encountered in casual fragments of oral history since I first came to Ifugao in 1960. Generally, it concerned a mass invasion of the Bannawol and Pu'itan districts by warriors from the Burnay district to the south.

The discovery of the underground chamber at Gawwa and its reputed connection with the Great Ifugao War greatly sharpened my interest in that presumably ancient event, which until now I had heard about only from relatively young men who were companions on the trail sociably passing the time of day. Now I brought the matter before some older and more knowledgeable informants from both the Bannawol and Pu'itan districts. The story I obtained from them, as translated by my principal ethnographic assistant, Emilio Pagada, is as follows.

"It was after the campaign of Salcedo, the grandson of Legaspi, in northern Luzon, when Bannawol was invaded by people from the direction of Burnay up to Cababuyan (Fig. 4). At mid-morning a force of armed men came and waged war on the prosperous villages of Bannawol. The invaders were calculated to be about four thousand warriors. They had first sacrificed animals to the gods and goddesses for favor and success in their plans of looting and plundering the villages of Bannawol. There was little sign of approval from the gods as made evident by their defeat, and the sacrificed animals perhaps did not please the gods, but the men armed themselves with bolos, spears, shields, and two of the crude Spanish rifles. All of the people from the different barrios from Burnay up to the north, including Cababuyan, joined the march of loot and plunder against the villages of Bannawol. One of those who held a Spanish rifle was known to be Taguiling and the holder of the other rifle is unknown. Being imbued with a dream of success, and their will strengthened by the possession of guns, they thought to terrify the people easily and bring home valuable things and food.

"At the time of the southern tribes' appearance at the borders of Bannawol, only the children, the aged, and a few nursing mothers were present in all the villages at Ambaliyu, Bo'oh, Lobongngan, Pangngat, and so on, for most of the inhabitants had gone to their work. Women were busy weeding in the rice fields or in their sweet potato fields, and the men had gone to the forest to get fuel or to hunt wild animals. When the invaders attacked the villages, the terrified children ran crying and shouting, hiding here and there in all sorts of confusion. Fear enveloped those

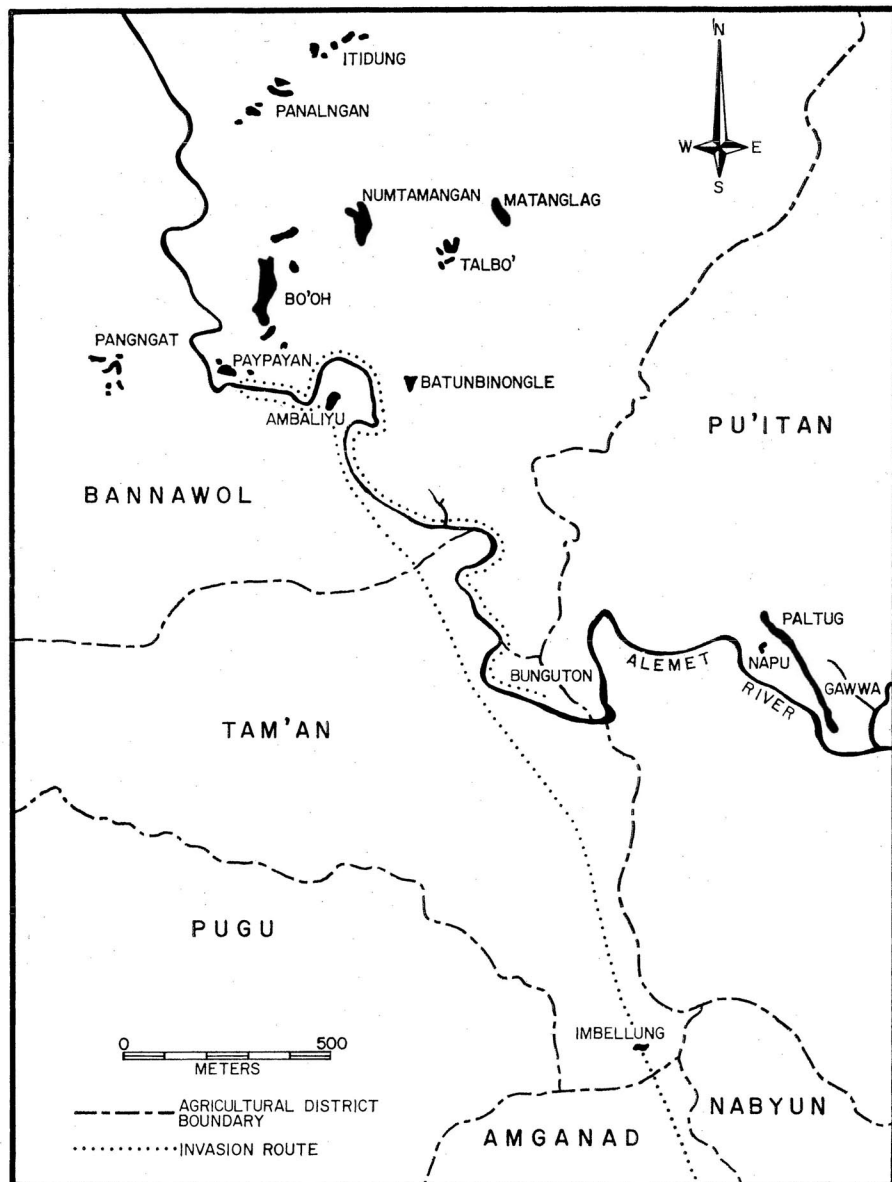


Fig. 4 Invasion of central Ifugao.

children and women so that some of them were shocked and fell unconscious as well as lost their speech, and it took some of them days to come to their normal senses.

"The enemy force reached in an unbroken line from Imbellung in the Tam'an district to the villages of Ambaliyu and Lobongngan. Those who were at Ambaliyu set fire to the houses after looting them and moved to the other side of the Alemen River towards Bo'oh thinking of attacking the eastern side of the village, while others marched towards Hiwor or Paypayan. Those who took the upper route and

occupied Lobongngan were also moving towards Bo'oh. They had crossed the river and were at the place where today the steps lead from the road to the high school also called Paypayan.

"The cry of the confused children and women and the yells of the invaders as well as the smoke of the burning houses of Ambaliyu gave the alarm to the other villagers. They took hold of their spears and shields, which they always carried with them wherever they went, and rushed to the defense of their children, women, and homes. They marched to meet the enemies. People from Numtamangan, Talbo', Itidung, and half of the residents of Bo'oh were already at Ilub, the eastern side of Bo'oh, while men from the villages of Panalngan, Oliwon, and others took their arms to the western side of Bo'oh at the rice fields to wait for the advancing enemy.

"Meanwhile, two brothers, Bitangnge and Pahigon, from the village Matanglag hurriedly performed a ritual, sacrificing a few chickens and offering them to the gods and goddesses for protection and help in driving away the plunderers. They were favored by the gods according to the bile of the sacrificed animals which showed good and favorable signs. After the ritual, they left in haste to meet the invaders. Four more men from village Talbo' who had also just finished a ritual joined them. They were Nganhena, Batangog, Agubban, and Umilah. So they were six in all. Pahigon was in the lead and Bitangnge was the next. The six courageous men were strengthened by the gods and to the onlookers they appeared like fearful giants. They passed through the rice fields above the Batunbinongle to Ilub and at last to Paypayan where the Immaculata High School is now erected and which was all rice fields at that time.

"They met the invaders at the place where now the steps go up to the Immaculata High School from the road. Here, Dango, the leader of the invaders, was climbing up and he came face to face with Pahigon who was also with his five companions. Dango nodded to Pahigon and said, 'I am Dango the cock.' Pahigon also nodded at him and answered, 'I am Pahigon of Bannawol, let us see who is the better man. Come forward and I will demonstrate to you how a Bannawol man fights in arms.' Pahigon was at the height of his strength and with great force cast one of the sharpened hard wood weapons of about a meter and a half in length and about the thickness of a boy's arm at Dango but it went wild. It went through the dike of the rice field and straight into the river, thus making a hole in the dike that the water flowed through. The followers of Dango saw the act with awe and wonder, perplexed with fear. Pahigon cast the second sharpened wood weapon of a lesser thickness but of the same length as the first at Dango. This time it hit Dango's shield with such a mighty blow that it went through the shield and stuck in it, making a crack in the thick shield of Dango, forcing him to turn around off balance. Dango stepped on the piece of wood sticking in his shield and broke it leaving a piece in the shield. Pahigon rushed towards Dango. Both held their shields well and struck against each other. They fought until both of them could hardly move for lack of breath. The two men were equally strong so that no one could say who would win. They both had the same skill and experience in warfare so that any stroke was parried by each of them. Then Pahigon quickly drew his bolo and gave a mighty blow on the shield of Dango. It cracked and part fell upon the rice field. Dango's body became vulnerable. Pahigon now had the chance to thrust his spear into the uncovered body of his adversary. Dango was not able to parry, and his broken shield was not enough



to cover his body. He was viciously wounded in his side but still fought furiously like a hungry wild beast of prey.

"At that time, Bitangnge turned around after finishing the fifth man he had slain. He saw Dango exposed to him so he thrust his spear into Dango's side so that Dango fell a crumpled heap on to the lower terrace. That was the end of the hardest man and leader of the invaders. Blood splashed on Bitangnge from Dango's body and Bitangnge also became dizzy and unconscious. Pahigon, his brother, stopped fighting and carried Bitangnge on his shoulder and brought him home. Those six men of Bannawol had parried the vicious attack of enemies from all sides. They put many men to death, and they remained unscathed. They were aided and protected by the gods and goddesses who had all come down from the broad heavens, and the six men were not injured by their enemies. A multitude swarmed over the scene of battle when they saw Bitangnge carried out by his brother, thinking that he was dead. So the other four men from among the six who had distinguished themselves withdrew to rest while the others fought.

"When the invaders saw their leader, Dango, dead with his head sticking down into the mud of the rice field, they shouted to their companions that their leader was dead. They lost hope and courage. They were much panic-stricken and fled, following the river downstream in confusion. But the men of Bannawol followed. Fighting took place at every turn of the river. The looters became desperate. They began to blame each other for the disaster, and some turned to fight against their comrades.

"They were pursued downstream until they reached a place called Bunguton, the deepest part of the river where the water falls. They stopped at a canyon wherein both sides of the river are steep with jagged rocks facing each side. In between, in the hollow, runs the river where there is no possible way out, for both upstream and down were multitudes of pursuers and fresh warriors who came from the direction of the Pu'itan district and were ready and eager to meet the fleeing southerners. In Pu'itan the women and children as well as the old were busy evacuating their valuable belongings for fear of their being taken by the looters. They hid those things in caves and among the bushes while the able-bodied men went to meet the plunderers. The men fought hard, killing many and making others prisoners by tying them on stones. Fighting continued until twilight.

"There at the river, Umilah, one of the six men who fought at the beginning of the battle at Paypayan, and Atingor, who had just come from a hunt, distinguished themselves during the fight at Bunguton. These two became engaged with two fierce fighters from among the fleeing enemy. Those two were tall, young, hardy and husky men, at the prime of their manhood. They met Umilah and Atingor face to face. Those two men from the invaders desperately threw their spears at the same time at Atingor and Umilah, but both went wild, hitting only the rocks. Umilah and Atingor did the same, but their spears also hit the rocks and were broken. Atingor and Umilah drew their bolos and rushed towards those two enemies and fought hard. It took them several hours in man-to-man combat until the two southerners were disarmed and yielded. They pleaded for their lives, so they were lashed with vines to two big rocks by the river. Almost all of the invaders were destroyed in that canyon by the combined forces of Bannawol and Pu'itan, which attacked from both ends of the narrow place and left no possibility of escape. The desperate

southerners, believing they all would die, threw away their valuable belongings such as gold necklaces into the deepest part of the river where the water falls and which we call *Lobong*. The two men who were lashed to the stone were set free after a ransom was paid. Only the group who were with the men who held the rifles escaped. They returned to their homes with those whose lives were spared at Pu'itan. After the great battle, many people went diving for the gold beads thrown away by the invaders into the river. That ended the great Ifugao War for there were no more invasions except for some killing of a few individuals. Only hatred and cursing by the southerners' widows against the people of Bannawol."

So ends a tale of Troy victorious. To the Ifugao it is a matter of factual history. It happened as it is told, and to real, still identifiable human beings. The intervention of deities provides no mythic element to their minds. Their many spirits and deities are very much a part of the real world as the Ifugao see it and are still believed to concern themselves with human affairs.

The reference to Salcedo, however, seems more like an element added from someone's recent formal education than an integral part of the original folk history. The presence of Spanish firearms is sufficient to place the events as post-Magellan. The question is whether we can be any more precise. Salcedo made the first Spanish explorations of northern Luzon in 1572 (Keesing 1962), but neither at that time nor subsequently before his death in 1576 is he reported to have been in or even near Ifugao country. It is possible, of course, that he made his presence felt from a distance. Certainly, Salcedo had a way of impressing local populations through brutality and pillage of a degree that even brought comment from some Spaniards. One should be wary of underestimating the capacity of Ifugao culture to absorb and hold events from the past. Salcedo's appearance upon the scene, even though distant, may have created sufficient turmoil so that its reverberations were incorporated in Ifugao oral history. Nevertheless, sensitivity to distant echoes of contact cannot account for two Spanish rifles.

We do know that the Spanish began to explore the upper Cagayan in 1591 (Keesing 1962). While these explorations seem to have fallen far short of Ifugao country, there is some evidence that a mission was established in either what is now Bagabag or Bayombong in 1637. At Bagabag one is very near the borders of Ifugao, and it is likely that the Ifugao would have been aware of the strangers. Some diffusion of ideas and objects could have occurred. More direct contact, however, so far as the evidence goes, had to wait until significantly later. According to Keesing, it was not until 1793 that "Fray P. Antolin made what seems to be the first recorded expedition into the high country around 'Quiangan', northwest of Bagabag" (Keesing 1962: 295).

The story itself, with its Spanish rifles, tells us that it is post-Spanish contact and this, combined with historical accounts which indicate that reasonably extensive Ifugao-Spanish contacts did not begin until shortly before the 19th century, suggests that the story dates from sometime in that century. The Ifugao agree. When asked whether this tale of heroes was to be found in any of their oral *hudhud* epics, they replied emphatically that the *hudhud* concerned much more ancient times. One of my informants, who is estimated by his college-educated son to be

85 years old, claimed that the story recounts events which happened when his grandfather was a young man.

The people of Gawwa are also convinced that the underground chamber discovered at their village had a role in the Great Ifugao War. As it is told in the story, however, the attack came as a surprise. The women were busy in the fields and the men in the forests. And the underground chamber was already prepared. The construction of the chamber shows planning and execution without haste. Its excavation is precise, the river stones in the walls are well placed so that even now none have been displaced, and the covering stones were obviously selected for their characteristics of size and flatness. To move the large stone alone into place must have been a major undertaking. Certainly the chamber was not constructed under the pressure of an attack in progress but represents a careful preparation for anticipated events.

The results of the archaeological excavation do indeed show that the chamber was already in existence and available for use, whether it was used or not, when the Burnay people invaded central Ifugao. From the culture-bearing deposit on the floor of the room we took sufficient charcoal for two radiocarbon analyses, one sample from the bottom 2 inches of the 4-inch deep layer and one from the top 2 inches. The first of these was sent to Geochron and returned an age of  $530 \pm 140$  B.P. (GX 3138) or A.D. 1280–1560. The second sample went to Gakushuin University in Japan and produced a date of  $530 \pm 100$  B.P. (GaK5238) or A.D. 1320–1520. The two dates obtained independently from different laboratories are remarkably similar, a fact which should increase confidence in their being near the center of the target. Further, the fact that the upper and lower materials of the floor deposit show no temporal distinction indicates that the deposit accumulated rapidly over a single and brief span of time. It would seem to me that this was most likely just after the chamber had been excavated but before it had been sealed with the large and small stones that formed its roof. After that, although the small entrance stone could have been lifted from time to time, even frequently, little accumulation would have taken place upon the floor of the chamber.

Barton (1919), from his vantage point in the early part of the American era, describes Ifugao warfare as essentially a matter of surprise raids by small groups of warriors taking enemy heads in vengeance. "There was no formal declaration of war. As a rule there were no large expeditions to the enemy country, and heads were taken from ambush, on the outskirts of an enemy village or along much travelled paths" (Barton 1919: 77). It is difficult to see the underground room at Gawwa, located in a village in the central and well-settled part of the district, as having any practical role in such sporadic and relatively unpredictable hostilities. The valuables thought to have been hidden there, the beads and gongs and porcelain jars, would seldom if ever have been taken in such forays on the peripheries. It is difficult to envision a wealthy Ifugao taking the symbols of his wealth off display and out of easy use for so slight a reason.

If the underground chamber was a hiding place for valuables, as the people insist, then it would seem to have been a response not to the kind of raiding usually thought of as typical of Ifugao warfare but to a seriously taken threat of invasion in force directed at the populated heart of the district. The story of the Great Ifugao War is an account of such an invasion during which the Gawwa chamber may have

served its function, but the data of archaeology and oral history make it clear that the chamber was prepared long before in anticipation of some ancient event. The conclusion this interpretation of the evidence leads toward is that large-unit warfare, aimed at the invasion and plunder of the populated centers of agricultural districts, was an aspect of Ifugao warfare not generally considered in the literature, but which nevertheless existed, at least as a threat in some peoples' minds, both during and before the Spanish era.

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